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## „Dlaczego Tomasz”, Michał Paluch, Warszawa 2012 : [recenzja]

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Michał Paluch, *Dlaczego Tomasz*, 262 pp.  
Warszawa: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2012

The book *Dlaczego Tomasz* [Why Thomas] by Fr. Michał Paluch, O.P., is a collection of texts published earlier in the forms of separate articles or conference speeches. However, the collection published in a book is not an accidental medley but a well-organized and logically ordered whole which defends itself very well in the new form published in 2012. The book is divided into three parts: the first one describes the intellectual standpoint of St. Thomas Aquinas within philosophy and theology, the second one presents his concept of God, while the third part discusses his position on the place of Christology within the soteriological analysis. The book is enriched with detailed footnotes full of valuable pieces of information and it is provided with neatly organized bibliographical lists including sources and studies. Additionally, it includes the index of persons mentioned in the book together with the English summary provided at the end. So much about the technical description of the values of the book. Now I will move on to considering the substantial merits of the publication.

Hopefully, there are many intellectuals to whom the writings of St. Thomas have always been and will be treated as presenting the value beyond doubt, though including certain human mistakes clear to later followers and critics. However, to many believers St. Thomas is just an old figure from the past, a saint to be celebrated without the necessary knowledge of what to adore in his life and writings. Additionally, after several centuries during which he was first forgotten or even openly criticized and misrepresented by large portions of the Western philosophers and theologians, and later slowly discovered anew and brought eventually somehow back to the debates, we must admit he is still relatively not known to many. Whatever is the state of interest and knowledge on him, he definitely needs to be better known to both intellectuals and com-

mon believers. That is why the book by Fr. Michał Paluch, O.P., answers the real and urgent need of our times and our society. The Polish speaking readers get the gift of a relatively simply written book on a rather difficult and interesting topic which should at least partly be familiar to Catholics and well educated as well as ambitious people in general. (That is why this book deserves its translation at least to the modern Latin, namely English. Let us hope that this review, written in English and published in a newly established journal, may contribute to the book's popularity outside Poland or outside the Polish speaking circle of readers.)

The book is vital not only due to its relative simplicity in presentation of certain parts of the complicated and monumental theory of St. Thomas. After all, there are already certain positions which get us nicely closer to the figure and writing of St. Thomas. One of such rich and available sources of knowledge for the Polish readers is the book often referred to by Fr. Paluch, namely the book by Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Święty Tomasz z Akwinu, mistrz duchowy*, translated by Agnieszka Kuryś, published by Instytut Tomistyczny—Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki in Warsaw—Kęty in 2008. However, there are still not many sources of information and analysis of St. Thomas which could be comprehensible for more or less common audience relatively interested in philosophy and theology. Moreover, the exceptional value of the book by Fr. Paluch comes from its concentration on several chosen aspects of St. Thomas's theory, which seem to be important in late modernity maybe even to a greater degree than they were at the time of St. Thomas. I am not a theologian or an expert on the intricacies of the scholastic philosophy. However, my interest in social philosophy, especially its fields inspired by theology, made me persuaded a long time ago that many answers to contemporary philosophical (and practically social) problems can be found in the theoretical standpoint presented by St. Thomas. Therefore, I agree with the Author and understand why Fr. Paluch did not provide a question mark at the end of the title of his book *Dlaczego Tomasz* [Why Thomas]. However, being involved in teaching contemporary social theory and debating contemporary social philosophies, I still see a great need of making St. Thomas seen as rich in argumentation really enlightening to the modern audience/society. I understand that the review does not provide space for a long discussion of such issues but I would like to briefly mention some points present in the book which made me notice the connection with important contemporary debates or problems which seem at first glance to be irresolvable to the modern way of perception.

A renowned contemporary social ethicist in my field of interest, namely Alasdair MacIntyre, put a lot of intellectual effort to bringing back to the modern West the actuality of the eudaimonistic virtue ethics. Naturally, he contributed to the recovering of the philosophical interest in Thomism. The debates between the so-called communitarians and the contemporary liberals provoked our coming back to the fundamental questions of modernity, like these concern-

ing freedom, free will, being vs. constructing, community vs. individual, personal activity vs. structural dependence, and many others. Late modern ecological concerns turned our attention to the issue of how much we accept the world as given in opposition to the attitude of its constant reconstruction and unilateral technological progress oftentimes leading to human tragedies. Of course these are just exemplary cases of modern trends uncovering contemporary conundrums. There have been many more theoretical and practical orientations which make our attention rightly turned back to the grave questions of the past as still vivid in the present. The book *Dlaczego Tomasz* is a clear example of pertinence of the matters raised by the good old realistic philosophy.

First of all, this philosophy effectively justified using reason because it relied on the assumption that reality is more or less reasonable, being created by Logos. Thus, it has been based on a great portion of trust toward the world, the humans, and their Creator. (Fr. Paluch devotes a large part of the first chapters to showing the attractiveness of this Thomistic attitude; an attitude which actually contributed largely to the sanctity of St. Thomas himself.) It is worthwhile to remind the modern and postmodern people that reason has a much deeper meaning and a longer history than just its roots in the Enlightenment. Fr. Paluch lets us realize the depth of Thomistic understanding of reason by referring us to Etienne Gilson's opinion on its revolutionary potential. The relative autonomy of human cognition is described by St. Thomas as possible due to reason seen as a gift from God and a gift enabling us to be free to discover and create on the basis of what is discovered (not *ex nihilo!*). I would venture to claim that if humanity had followed this Thomistic idea of reason, we would have had a chance of avoiding the major historical tragedies stemming from adopting a different and false idea of human autonomy linked with arbitrary free will inspired by Ockham and developed by the followers of Descartes (as it is theologically analyzed by Servais Pinckaers, O.P. in his *Sources of Christian Ethics*). The motives considered later in Fr. Paluch's book concerning the creation *ex nihilo* or the rule of non-contradiction in God's reality also touch upon this problem and as such are equally vital for the social philosophers debating the matter of relative vs. absolute dependence in our times. It seems that since the beginning of modernity around five centuries ago the understanding of freedom and autonomy has slowly eroded within the area between two extremes of absolute autonomy without constraints provided by the good on the one hand, and the total lack of any freedom on the other. The Thomistic alternative thus seems as the still most attractive solution of this pseudodilemma offered to us by the founders of modernity. The reason's creativity perceived as a gift created to be given in return, devoted to uncover the mysteries of the reality initially independent of the observer, sounds like cutting the gordian knot of the modern epistemological crises and later social experiments based on their mistakes.

Read by a social theorist, the book under review rings many bells, pointing our attention to how much the political and social philosophy (including even the philosophy of education) is rooted in fundamental debates raised by theologians during the peak of the Middle Ages. The aforementioned motive of human freedom/autonomy linked with personal dignity and reason inspired the views of the Fathers of Vaticanum II on the freedom of conscience, as Fr. Paluch points out on page 56. What seems equally important is his comment about the contemporary lack of pedagogical appreciation of coercive methods necessary to form the will. We rely mostly on the intellect for the moral education and probably that is why the Thomistic view on forming conscience must have been more adequate compared with our one-sided perspective (p. 57). Another topic inspiring the views during Vaticanum II, and as I agree with the Author, still vital today, is the way of treating the natural order as good (and then perfected by grace). Such a view constitutes a solid platform for dialogue with people of all cultures and religions, which was fruitfully confirmed not only by Vaticanum II but also by the teaching of St. John Paul II and his inter-religious dialogue. Contemporary social philosophers inspired by St. Thomas, like the late New Feminist Mary F. Rousseau, persuasively treated the natural order as the basis of the primary community which could later develop into a fully blown, consciously embraced and creatively organized association.

The changing theological perception of God as expressing just arbitrary will with his creation, together with the positive view of negation and “nothingness,” gradually narrowed our perspectives on freedom and reduced the role of love as the motive of God’s creative initiative (Part II of Fr. Paluch’s book). Slowly but steadily it imprinted itself in the social thinking which had its practical effects in the shapes of social institutions which, on the one hand, were established to guard individual freedoms, while on the other hand, came to be seen as the expression of the arbitrary power of the state or social system which has supposedly always been opposed to human freedom. The biblical motive of creation, namely God’s love, gradually came to be lost from sight as the inspiring force of human and social relations. The relations themselves lost their realistic ontological status, largely due to the *désintéressement* or misinterpretation of the reality of the Trinity.

Luckily, the contemporary readers of John Paul II’s theology of the body may enjoy treating his audiences about human love as the creative follow-up to St. Thomas, who has been forgotten or neglected by many and who came to be well rediscovered through the theological/anthropological reflections on human sexuality. The triple unity of God found its image of “dual unity” of marriage neatly presented by the Polish Pope. His intellectual efforts recovered *and developed* the Thomistic arguments about the Trinity and marriage/family showing both the love of God and the goodness of nature, especially the unique role of human sexuality. John Paul II said that “*man became the*

*image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.*"<sup>1</sup> The pope developed this argument first in his Wednesday audiences and later in the Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "The fact that man 'created as man and woman' is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way, to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16)" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7).

The relational concept of the human person created as the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God found its place in an often quoted fragment of the Second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that "man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (24). Interestingly enough, women connected with the New Feminism, which is inspired by theology of the body and John Paul II's teaching on women, are now the ones who stress both the value of Thomism and the vital role of women as the ones who enable men to enter into ecstatic relations based on love that joins equal subjects in love imaging the Holy Trinity. (This could be an inspiration for those who would like to correct some views of St. Thomas on women.)

A sociologist may identify the Trinitarian picture as an interesting analogy with the Simmelian idea of a minimal social group constituted by three persons (due to the qualitative difference made by the importance of interactions with relations, not only with individuals). However, not knowing whether Georg Simmel actually was or was not aware of the depth of St. Thomas's analysis, reading the clear explanation of St. Thomas's trinitarian theory done by Fr. Paluch, we see Thomas as more interesting and deeper than Simmel. The former shows the mechanism of acting of a relation itself to a much greater extent! Coming back to the discussion on the status of relations seems urgently needed in times of dominant individualism. Human community does not yet find a more ennobling place in any modern social philosophy than the Thomistically developed Aristotelianism. And it badly needs one for sure.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006) (9:3), 163 [Emphasis in the citations present in the original].

The up-to-dateness of the Thomistic reflections on the Trinity is also confirmed by the great misunderstanding of the Christian concept by Muslims. I presume I do not need to develop the topic on practical effects of that misunderstanding and accusations directed against Christians supposedly believing in three gods rather than one... I will also venture an opinion that thanks to the Catholics adhering to St. Thomas, their societies were not as prone as to turn either to individualism or communism. (Both Protestants and Orthodox societies were not as safely kept from the influence of these doctrines, respectively.) What is more, Thomas Aquinas should be referred to nowadays because of the attractiveness of his way of linking unity and difference, as Fr. Paluch mentions on page 127. The present debates on multiculturalism or other forms of social coexistence constitute good fields for the necessity of such argumentation. Speaking of necessity... Here comes another area which could clearly benefit from the Thomistic perspective: the modern methodology of science could definitely use some of the crucial reflections about the distinctions between necessity and adequacy (*convenientia*) or relative necessity. The modern emphasis which is too strongly put on absolute necessity as the only scientific standard calls for a more soft alternative introduced by St. Thomas in his soteriology and that is why, I think that Fr. Paluch's comments and attitude concerning this issue at the beginning sentences of the chapter on page 152 seem to me even too modest or cautious. His argumentation is so clear that it easily presents St. Thomas as a much better alternative than the modern shallow and one-sided view of either-or in terms of the necessity/contingency of Salvation history or other aspects of reality. As Fr. Paluch himself brilliantly shows by his presentation of Hegel's views on necessity *de facto* excluding freedom, St. Thomas's vision deserves even more of an applause rather than what the introductory remarks suggest.

Really fabulous is the reconstruction of the soteriological arguments of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. Their views are presented as complementary and equally fascinating, with more philosophical accent identified in the former and more mystical aspects noticed in the latter. Attractive as it is, I would offer a polemic to this view, suggesting that Thomistic philosophy is equally mystical (as Jean-Pierre Torrell claimed) and proposing, though without proofs yet, that both versions of great theologians are even closer to each other than it looks at first sight to the analytical male mind. Maybe I should be more cautious but my female intuition tells me that reconciliation of the two masters of thought and masters of mysticism is not really necessary. Maybe they actually do already say the same thing despite putting accents in different places. But maybe I am wrong? The review, however, does not provide enough space to discuss such details. Let it just inspire the readers to look for their own answers.

Reconciliation which has been shown well as achieved by St. Thomas in his theorizing is that between justice and mercy, while we—contemporary peo-

ple—often still have trouble with linking them together and we rather choose to oppose them. Or at least we often think that we owe the reconciliation only to St. Theresa of Lisieux and St. Faustina who presented these realities as linked together in their visions. Additionally, it is worth reminding us that being God's instrument the way Christ has been in his mission of Salvation is not degrading but ennobling. Late modern people need to hear that in contrast to the largely derogatory treatment of any activity devoted to service, therefore it seems good Fr. Paluch refers to the old arguments on this topic. Finally, an absolutely wonderful and very important is the juxtaposition of the mission of Christ in Salvation presented by St. Thomas and the twentieth-century Belgian theologian Jacques Dupuis. Fr. Paluch's consistent following of the Thomistic argument not only persuades me about Thomas's adequacy on this point but it may also make readers better understand the logic behind Vaticanum II on this matter and the standpoint of John Paul II on his conciliatory initiatives.

Having mentioned all the arguments which I found inspiring in the book by Fr. Michał Paluch, O.P., I must definitely say that he reassured me and hopefully will persuade many others *why Thomas* is still valuable nowadays. The last sentences of the book are only too cautious in praises as Thomas just cannot sink into oblivion but needs to be read, debated and, last but not least, admired even by those who do not agree with him. However, while my words of admiration may discourage some people from discovering Thomism, Fr. Paluch's well balanced approach will surely motivate readers to delve deeply into St. Thomas's writings on their own.

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